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*Proposed Resource Management Plan and  
Final Environmental Impact Statement*

***Bighorn Basin Resource Management Plan Revision Project***

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## **Appendix X**

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Visual Resource Inventory

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1.0	Overview.....	X-1
2.0	Delineating Scenic Quality Rating Units .....	X-1
3.0	Scenic Quality Evaluation .....	X-1
4.0	Sensitivity Level Analysis .....	X-2
5.0	Distance Zones.....	X-2
6.0	Visual Resource Inventory Classes .....	X-3
7.0	References.....	X-11

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table X-1.	Visual Resource Inventory Matrix.....	X-3
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## **LIST OF MAPS**

Map X-1.	Scenic Quality Rating Units.....	X-5
Map X-2.	Scenic Quality Evaluation.....	X-6
Map X-3.	Sensitivity Levels.....	X-7
Map X-4.	Distance Zones.....	X-8
Map X-5.	Bighorn Basin Visual Resource Inventory .....	X-9

## ***Appendix X – Visual Resource Inventory***

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## **APPENDIX X**

### **VISUAL RESOURCE INVENTORY**

#### **1.0 OVERVIEW**

The visual resource inventory process provides Bureau of Land Management (BLM) managers with a means for determining visual values. The inventory consists of a scenic quality evaluation, sensitivity level analysis, and a delineation of distance zones. Based on these three factors, BLM-administered lands are placed into one of four visual resource inventory classes. These inventory classes represent the relative value of the visual resources. Classes I and II being the most valued, Class III representing a moderate value, and Class IV being of least value. The inventory classes provide the basis for considering visual values in the resource management planning (RMP) process. Visual Resource Management classes are established through the RMP process for all BLM-administered lands. During the RMP process, the class boundaries are adjusted as necessary to reflect the resource allocation decisions made in RMPs.

#### **2.0 DELINEATING SCENIC QUALITY RATING UNITS**

The Planning Area is subdivided into scenic quality rating units (SQRUs) for rating purposes. Rating areas are delineated on a basis of: like physiographic characteristics; similar visual patterns, texture, color, variety, etc.; and areas which have similar impacts from man-made modifications. The size of SQRU's may vary from several thousand acres to 100 or less acres, depending on the homogeneity of the landscape features and the detail desired in the inventory. Refer to Map X-1 to see the SQRUs delineated for the Bighorn Basin.

#### **3.0 SCENIC QUALITY EVALUATION**

Scenic quality is a measure of the visual appeal of a tract of land. In the visual resource inventory process, public lands are given an A, B, or C rating based on the apparent scenic quality which is determined using seven key factors: landform, vegetation, water, color, adjacent scenery, scarcity, and cultural. During the rating process, each of these factors are ranked on a comparative basis with similar features within the physiographic province. The "Ecoregions of the United States" by R.G. Bailey is used in making these refinements (Bailey 1994). An important premise of the evaluation is that all public lands have scenic value, but areas with the most variety and most harmonious composition have the greatest scenic value. Another important concept is that the evaluation of scenic quality is done in relationship to the natural landscape. This does not mean that man-made features within a landscape necessarily detract from the scenic value. Man-made features that complement the natural landscape may enhance the scenic value. Evaluations should avoid any bias against man-made modification to natural landscape. Each SQRU is evaluated by an interdisciplinary team by observing the area from several important viewpoints. Scores should reflect the evaluator's overall impression of the area. Refer to Map X-2 for an illustration of the scenic quality evaluation for the Bighorn Basin.

## **4.0 SENSITIVITY LEVEL ANALYSIS**

Sensitivity levels are a measure of public concern for scenic quality. Public lands are assigned high, medium, or low sensitivity levels by analyzing the various indicators of public concern. In evaluating sensitivity levels, the following six key factors are considered:

1. Type of Users. Visual sensitivity will vary with the type of users. Recreational sightseers may be highly sensitive to any changes in visual quality, whereas workers who pass through the area on a regular basis may not be as sensitive to change.
2. Amount of Use. Areas seen and used by large numbers of people are potentially more sensitive. Protection of visual values usually becomes more important as the number of viewers increase.
3. Public Interest. The visual quality of an area may be of concern to local, state, or national groups. Indicators of this concern are usually expressed in public meetings, letters, newspaper or magazine articles, newsletters, land-use plans, etc. Public controversy created in response to proposed activities that would change the landscape character should also be considered.
4. Adjacent Land Uses. The interrelationship with land uses in adjacent lands can affect the visual sensitivity of an area. For example, an area within the view shed of a residential area may be very sensitive, whereas an area surrounded by commercially developed lands may not be visually sensitive.
5. Special Areas. Management objectives for special areas such as Natural Areas, Wilderness Areas or Wilderness Study Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Scenic Areas, Scenic Roads or Trails, and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, frequently require special consideration for the protection of the visual values. This does not necessarily mean that these areas are scenic, but rather that one of the management objectives may be to preserve the natural landscape setting. The management objectives for these areas may be used as a basis for assigning sensitivity levels.
6. Other Factors. Consider any other information such as research or studies that includes indicators of visual sensitivity.

Map X-3 illustrates the sensitivity levels evaluated for the Bighorn Basin.

## **5.0 DISTANCE ZONES**

Landscapes are subdivided into three distance zones based on relative visibility from travel routes or observation points. The three zones are: foreground-middleground, background, and seldom seen. The foreground-middleground zone includes areas seen from highways, rivers, or other viewing locations which are less than 3 to 5 miles away. Seen areas beyond the foreground-middleground zone but usually less than 15 miles away are in the background zone. Areas not seen as foreground-middleground or background (i.e., hidden from view) are in the seldom-seen zone. For the Bighorn Basin, linear transportation routes transect through nearly the entire planning area, which eliminates the background and seldom seen areas. As a result, the entire Bighorn Basin Planning Area is evaluated and delineated as foreground/middle ground zone. Refer to Map X-4 for an illustration of the Planning Area's distance zones.

## 6.0 VISUAL RESOURCE INVENTORY CLASSES

After evaluating and rating scenic quality, sensitivity levels, and delineating distance zones, visual resource inventory classes are assigned to each SQRU. Class I is assigned to those areas where a management decision has been made previously to maintain a natural landscape. This includes areas such as national wilderness areas, the wild section of national wild and scenic rivers, and other congressionally and administratively designated areas where decisions have been made to preserve a natural landscape. Classes II, III, and IV are assigned based on a combination of scenic quality, sensitivity level, and distance zones. This is accomplished by combining the three overlays for scenic quality, sensitivity levels, and distance zones and using the guidelines shown in Table X-1 to assign the proper class. The end product is a visual resource inventory class overlay as shown in Map X-5. Inventory classes are informational in nature and provide the basis for considering visual values in the RMP process.

**Table X-1. Visual Resource Inventory Matrix**

		Visual Sensitivity Levels							
		High			Medium			Low	
Special Areas		I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
Scenic Quality	A	II	II	II	II	II	II	II	II
	B	II	III	III*	III	IV	IV	IV	IV
	C	III	IV	IV	IV	IV	IV	IV	IV
		f/m	b	s/s	f/m	b	s/s	s/s	
		Distance Zones							

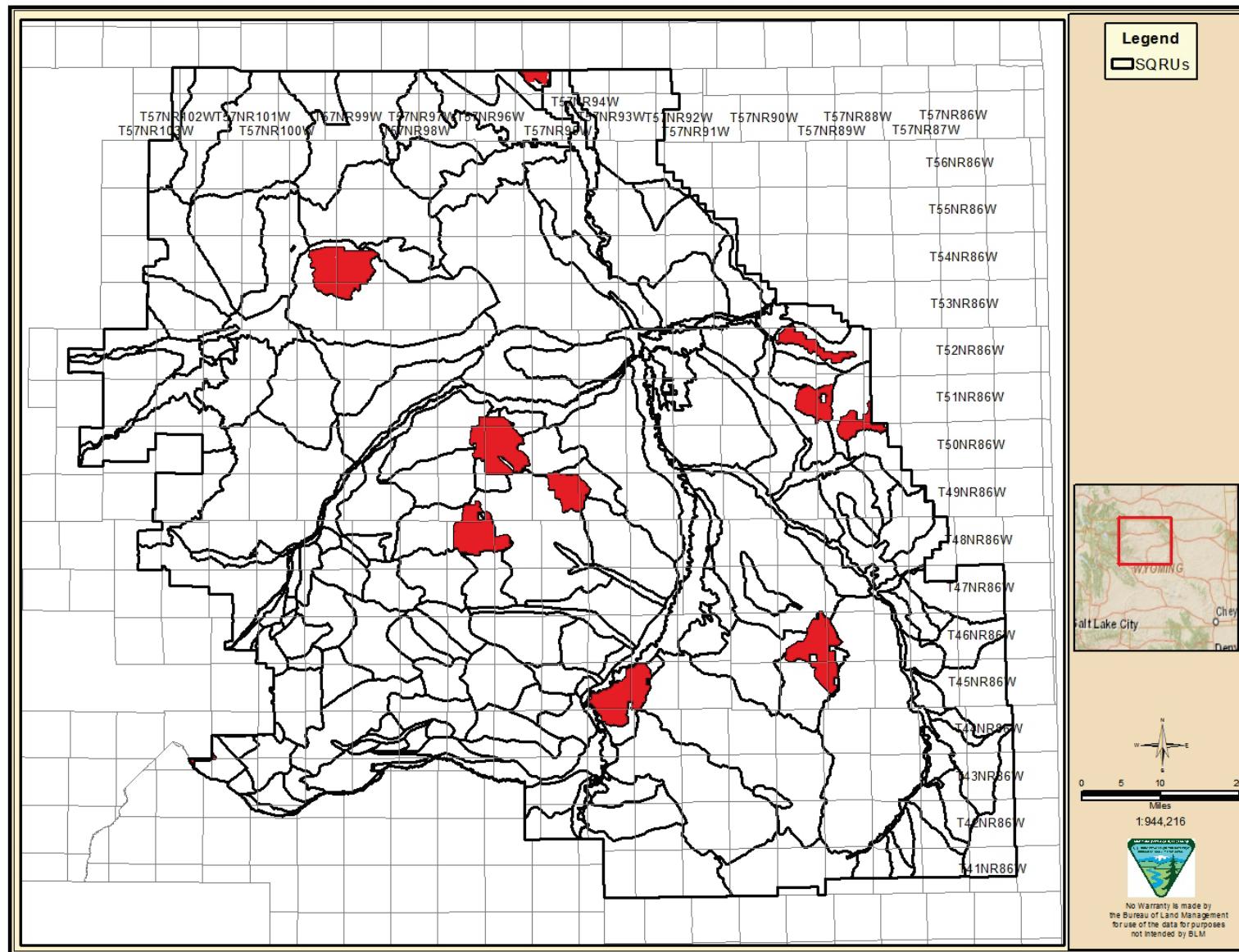
Source: BLM 1986

Distance zones: f/m = foreground-middleground, b = background, s/s = seldom seen areas

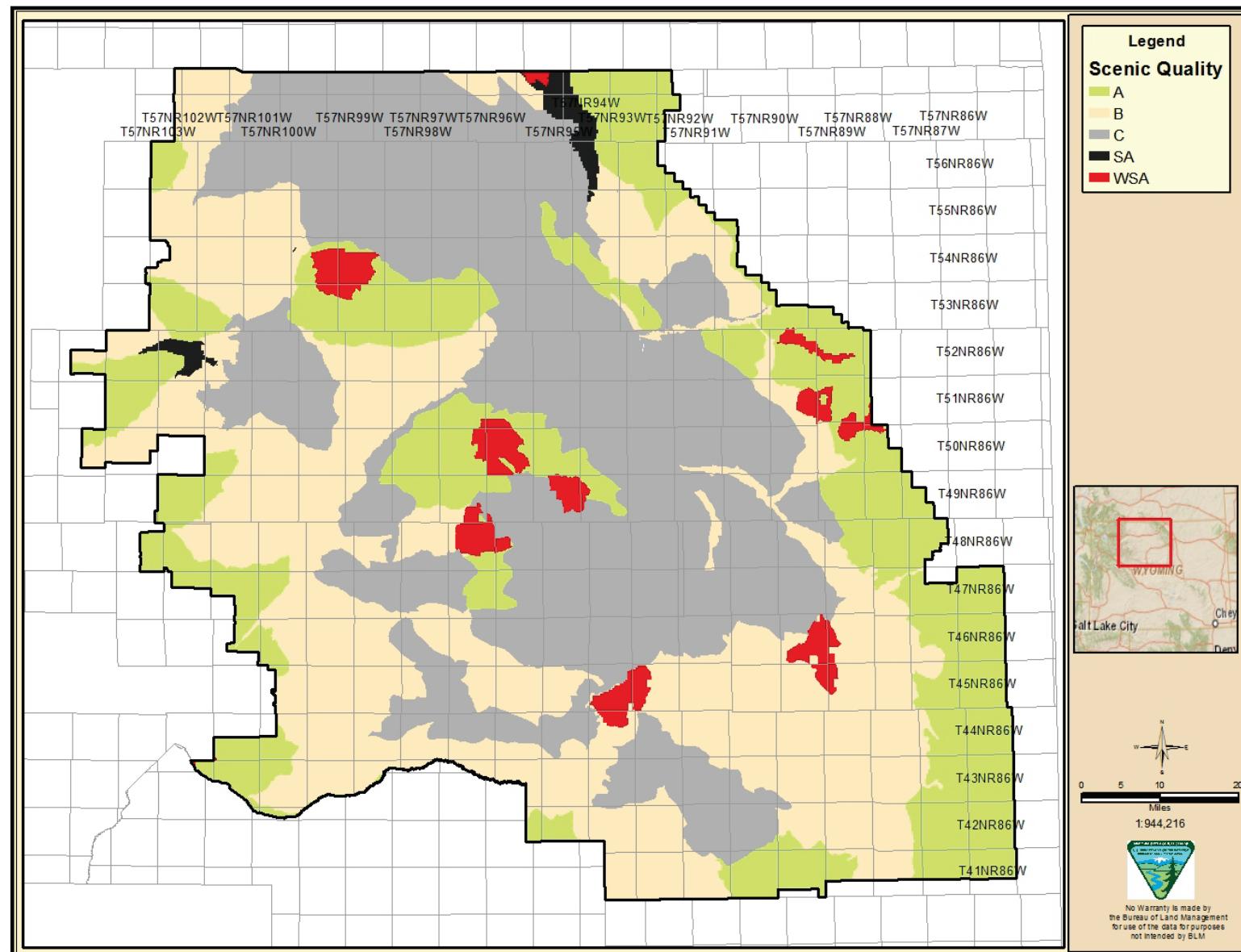
\*If adjacent area is Class III or lower, assign Class III, if higher, assign Class IV

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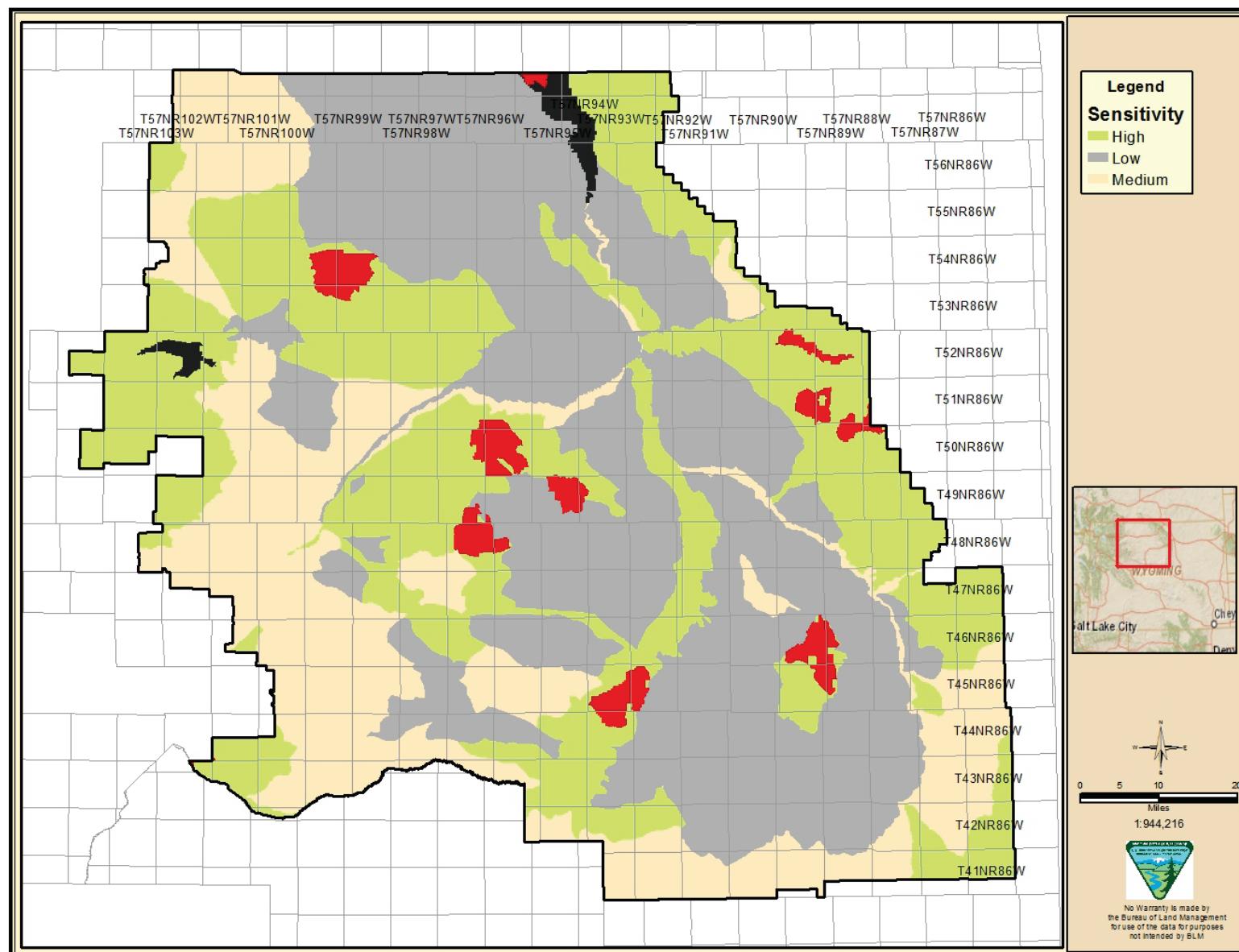
**Map X-1. Scenic Quality Rating Units**



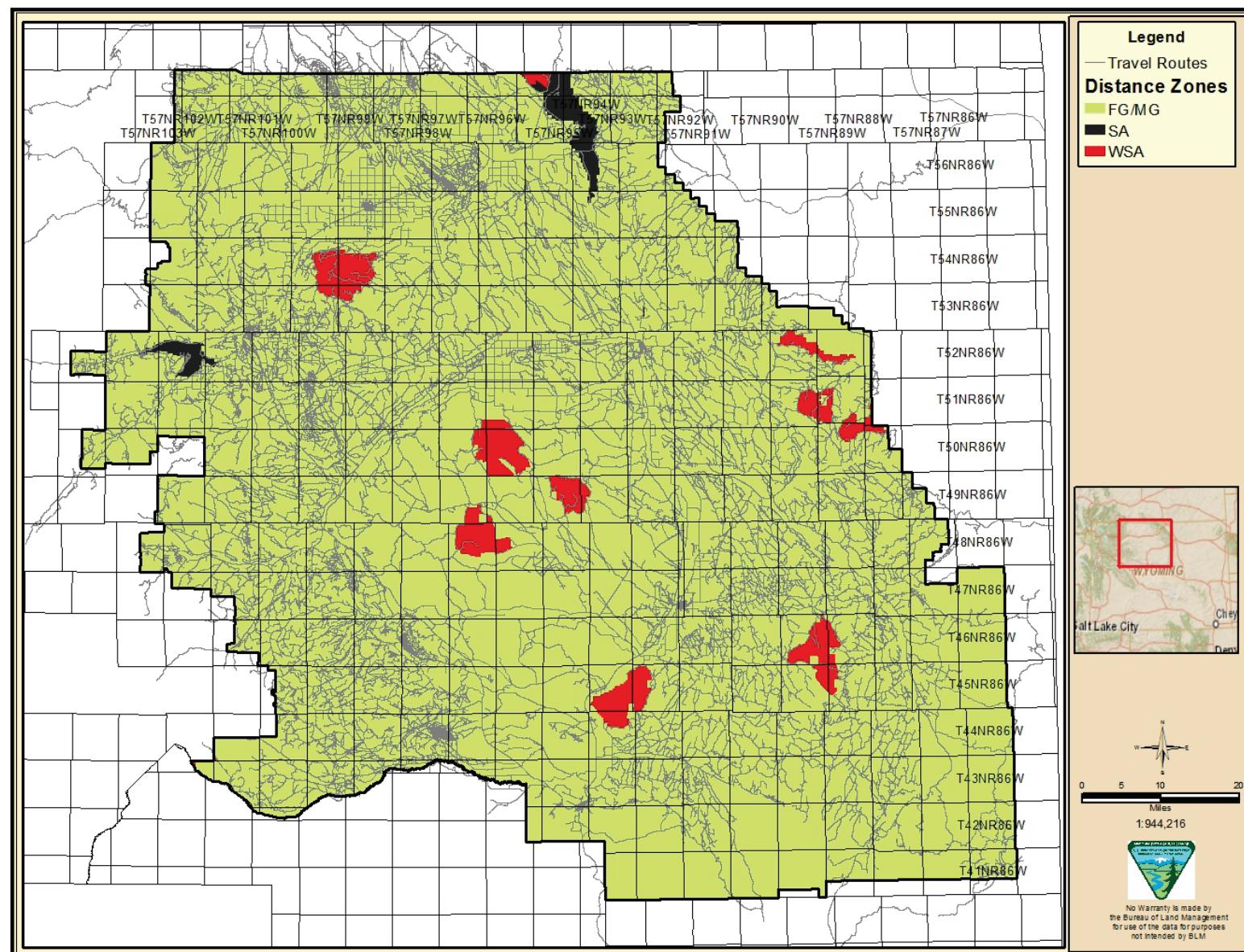
**Map X-2. Scenic Quality Evaluation**



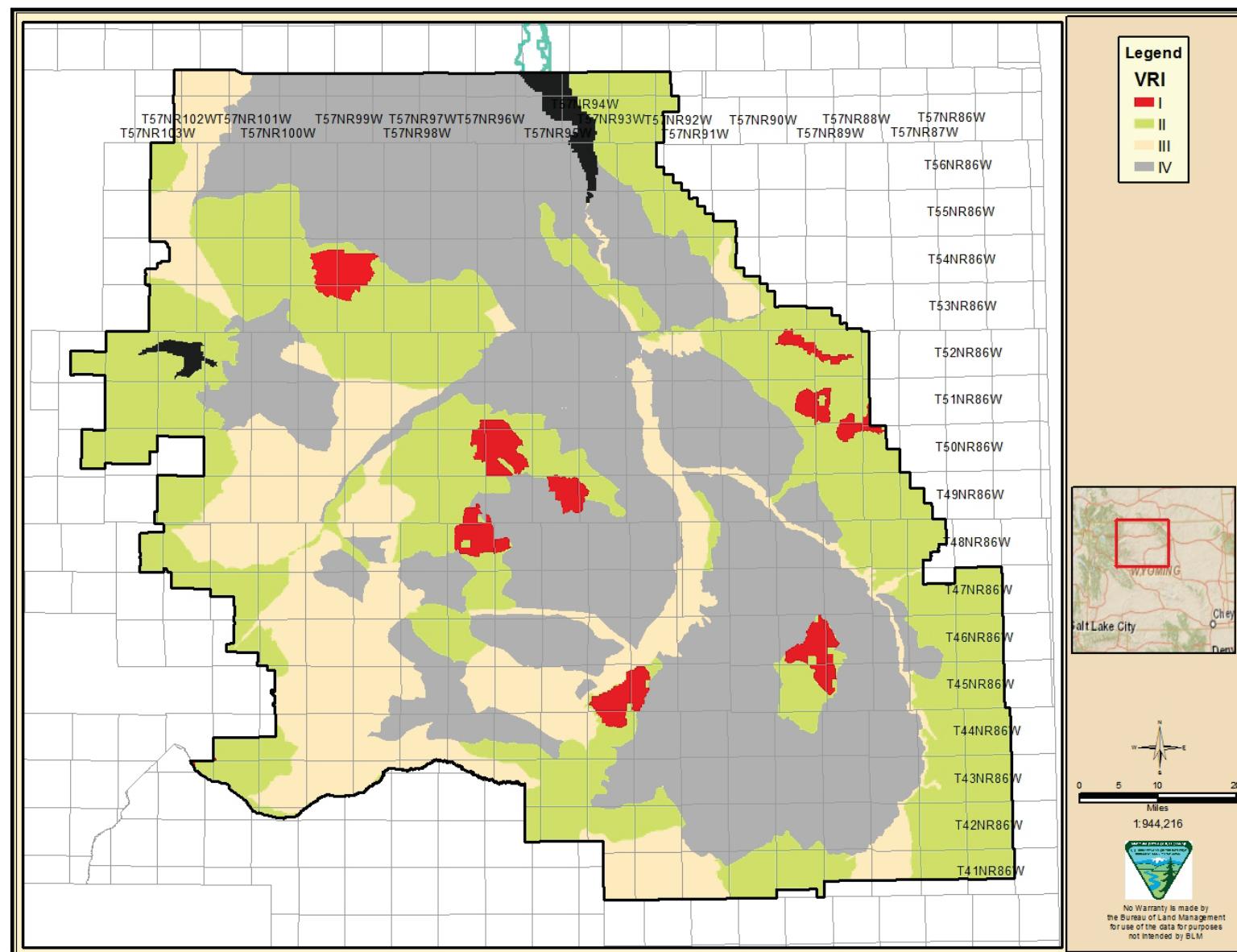
**Map X-3. Sensitivity Levels**



**Map X-4. Distance Zones**



**Map X-5. Bighorn Basin Visual Resource Inventory**



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## **7.0 REFERENCES**

- Bailey, R.G. 1994. Ecoregions of the United States, USDA Forest Service. Available online: <http://www.fs.fed.us/rm/ecoregions/products/map-ecoregions-united-states/#>.
- BLM. 1986. Manual 8410-1, Visual Resource Inventory. U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management. Washington, D.C. Available online: <http://www.blm.gov/nstc/VRM/8410.html>.

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